

# FATALITY



AFZF-CG

## DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY HEADQUARTERS III CORPS AND FORT HOOD FORT HOOD, TEXAS 76544-5056



30 July 2002

MEMORANDUM FOR SEE DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: Training Fatalities and Leadership Involvement – Fatality Memo # 02-16

1. Last week, three 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division soldiers died in a terrible rollover accident on a paved range road involving a 5-ton truck with five soldiers aboard. While negotiating a downhill slope, the driver lost control of the truck, causing it to go across the opposite lane and then overturn into a ditch. The driver and one occupant were crushed to death under the weight of the overturned truck. A third soldier died from massive head injuries as a result of the horrific crash. With these three fatalities, we have experienced nine training fatalities throughout the Corps so far in FY2002. These nine are a 125% increase over the four training fatalities III Corps recorded last fiscal year—not a record any of us should be proud of! Although the accident is still under investigation, I want to share some known facts and lessons learned.

2. Indications are that the driver was operating the 5-ton truck approximately 20-plus mph above the posted speed limit of 40 mph on the range road. The driver of the 5-ton had to suddenly brake when another vehicle in front of him applied its brakes, resulting in the 5-ton sliding across the opposite lane and running into a ditch, and overturning. The truck came to rest on its left side, facing into the direction of its original travel. The damage to the truck was so severe that at first sight the model type was not easily recognizable. Fortunately, no vehicles were approaching from the opposite direction at that moment, or the incident could have turned out even worse. Although the 5-ton carried troops, it was not configured with fixed troop seats as required by AR 385-55. The safety/troop strap was also missing. The NCOIC of the soldiers was riding in a POV that was traveling in front of the 5-ton instead of taking his duty position as the senior person in the truck. Improper dispatch procedures and last minute tasking that did not allow for adequate planning/risk assessments were also involved.

3. Just as was the case with several other recent III Corps fatal training accidents, this one could have been avoided—if standards had been followed and leaders had been fully engaged in properly supervising. It is painfully sad and totally unacceptable that our soldiers die in training because of poor leadership, while doing what they came in the Army for—to train to get ready for battle. Although equally tragic, we can expect some off-duty fatalities/injuries, where leadership is not normally present. But, for on-duty/training events, where leadership is normally no more than an arms' length away, accidents should never happen—if leadership is 100% engaged/focused and enforcing standards. Engaged leadership that enforce standards "by the book" consciously remove accident factors that otherwise could creep into the picture. Investigations have shown that it takes about five to seven factors/ingredients (violations of known Army standards) for an accident to occur. Remove one or more of the "ingredients," and a leader prevented the accident that was waiting to happen. I call this "alignment of the planets" when all the right ingredients for an accident are in just the wrong position before an accident. This is where your leadership, especially your junior leaders, MUST effectively inject themselves to ensure that accident factors are mitigated through proper planning and risk management.

4. I expect commanders to gain control of their formations and charge their unit leaders to quickly turn this training fatality carnage around. I want commanders to get in front of their leaders and ruthlessly articulate to them the importance of leadership presence for training events and enforcement of standards. Standards are there. All we have to do is know, apply, and enforce them. With nine training fatalities so far in FY2002, it is clear that we have a leadership failure on our hands—we are failing our soldiers in the most fundamental way! I believe that if standards were correctly followed for every one of our FY2002 fatal training incidents, the loved ones/friends of the nine Corps soldiers who died in training would not be grieving today.

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B. B. BELL  
Lieutenant General, USA  
Commanding

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